Two Conceptions of Conceptualism and Nonconceptualism[1]

A familiar proposal in recent philosophy of perception is that perceptual experiences possess "nonconceptual" content: that how experiences represent the world does not, in some sense, involve concepts.[2] Though it enjoys widespread support, this "nonconceptualist" claim is disputed. "Conceptualists" deploy a range of arguments purporting to show that the content of perceptual experience is, and must be, concept-involving "conceptual" content.[3]

My aim here is not to offer new arguments for or against nonconceptualism, but to work towards a better understanding of precisely what is at issue between nonconceptualists and their conceptualist opponents. Nonconceptualism and conceptualism are often assumed to be well-defined theoretical approaches that each constitute unitary claims about the contents of experience. I aim to show that this assumption is mistaken. There are different ways of understanding the distinction between "conceptual" and "nonconceptual" content; differences that manifest themselves in the recent debate in apparently divergent assumptions, on the parts of the theorists involved, about what it is for a content be to conceptual or nonconceptual.

That there are different ways of understanding these notions of content is not necessarily problematic. Many potential sources of ambiguity are harmless. But I will argue that some familiar lines of argument and counterargument in the recent debate about nonconceptualism are unpersuasive, and that it is insufficient sensitivity to the different ways that the relevant notions of content can be understood that explains why. So, understanding and acknowledging a distinction between two different kinds of issues about the nature of perceptual content is, I hope to show, indispensable if this particular dispute about perceptual experience is to progress.

In section 1 I set out some assumptions about the notion of content, and what it is to possess a concept, that are common across the debate. In sections 2 and 3 I distinguish "compositional" from "possessional" conceptions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism, and on the basis of this distinction I go on to characterize a range of possible positions about perceptual content that it is open for a theorist to occupy. In section 4 I give what I take to be the central arguments for nonconceptualism and conceptualism. I then use aspects of the discussion from the previous section in an attempt to show that neither of these arguments deliver. I end by preempting and reacting to some sources of scepticism about whether the distinction I have tried to substantiate can be drawn in the way I claim.

1. Content and concept

The neutral notion of "content" at issue in the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists is of the *truth-evaluable* content of perceptual experience. I here take truth-evaluable content to be propositional content. In propositional attitude sentences like "Luke believes that Santa came down the chimney" what is reported is a mental state or event in which a subject is related by a psychological attitude to a proposition. The role of propositions in an account of mental phenomena is shaped by their connection with notions of correctness. The propositional content of a mental state like a belief sets a correctness condition for that belief: it determines how the world must be in order for that state to represent correctly. Whether the state represents correctly is thus a question of whether the propositional content of the state and the correctness condition it sets is satisfied by how things are in the world. Luke's belief that Santa came down the chimney is true if and only Santa did in fact come down the chimney, and it is incorrect otherwise. Propositions, further,

are to be distinguished from the psychological attitudes subjects have towards them. Two thinkers may possess different attitudes towards the very same proposition, as is the case when Luke believes that Santa has visited in the night and Sascha hopes that he has.

What are propositions? On the classical Russellian account, propositions are structured complexes consisting of entities at the level of reference: sequences of objects and properties, or objects and relations. A state possessing a Russellian content specifiable in terms of the ordered pair <Is a writer, Simon> is correct if and only if the worldly individual, Simon, instantiates the property of being a writer. By contrast, on a classical Fregean account, the propositional objects of attitudes do not consist of entities at the level of reference but of "senses" or "modes of presentation" of objects or properties. The Fregean account is motivated by failures of truth preservation across content-attributions differing only in co-referring terms. While Lily, let us suppose, believes that Charlie Parker plays the alto she may, rationally, fail to believe that Bird plays the alto, though Charlie Parker and Bird are the same individual. For the Fregean, the rationality of this pattern of belief is that the content of Lily's belief involves not Parker himself, but involves a mode of presentation, or a "concept" of him.

The debate about the truth-evaluable content of perceptual experience takes place against a broad background of agreement that accounting for the cognitive significance of beliefs, thoughts and judgements requires understanding their contents along Fregean lines; as consisting of concepts. I shall not question this assumption here. Neither shall I question the idea that in order for someone to have some particular belief they must possess the concepts involved in the belief content. Luke, I shall take it, could not believe that Santa came down the chimney unless he possessed the concepts *Santa*, *x is a chimney* and *x came down y*.

While at its most general, to have the concept *F* has often been thought to consist just in an ability to recognize Fs, and to discriminate Fs from non-Fs, the notion of concept possession in play in this recent dispute about perceptual experience is more robust. For writers within the Fregean and Wittgensteinian tradition in which this debate about perceptual experience has taken shape, the possession of a concept involves the possession of an ability to use the linguistic term "F" on the right occasions, and in the right way.[4] For later writers within the same tradition, the possession of a concept may not necessarily consist in a verbal ability, but in the possession of a range of different judgemental and inferential abilities.[5] In order to possess the concept *F*, one must—it is characteristically claimed—be disposed to make the judgement that that is F, when one is presented with an F (or the apparent presence of an F). And for one to possess the concept *F*, one must also be able to make the inference from the judgement that a is F, to the judgement that a is G, where being G is an analytic (or more broadly "conceptual") consequence of something's being F. The point of calling the possession of the concept F the possession of an ability is to indicate that the concept possessed can be exercised on different occasions, not only in the thinking of the thought that a is F but in the thoughts that b is F or that c is F.[6] While these cognitive skills are not necessarily verbal, the sensitivity to analytic or rational relations involved in the possession of these abilities is to be distinguished from the hardwired recognitional capacities that enable pre-linguistic infants and animals to distinguish Fs from non-Fs within their environment: capacities that neo-Fregeans have characterized as "brutely causal"[7].

At the heart of the recent debate about perceptual experience is the question of the relation between experience and belief. There are respects in which perceptual experience appears similar to belief, and respects in which it appears different. Perceptual experiences are conscious mental events or episodes. Unlike beliefs, they are not mental states. But

perceptual experiences are like beliefs in possessing truth-evaluable contents.[8] As I look out of the window down into the street it appears to me that the wind is blowing leaves from the tree in the garden. My perceptual experience is veridical if its content is satisfied by how things are—if the wind is blowing leaves from the tree in the garden—and it is non-veridical if its content fails to be satisfied by how things are, as it will be if my experience is illusory or hallucinatory. As in the case of belief, we can distinguish between the content of the perceptual experience and the attitude towards it. For how things are represented by me as being in perceptual experience might be the very same way that I might, for example, imagine things to be.

For a number of theorists, the possession of truth-evaluable content by perceptual experience is an upshot of the fact that perceptual experience is simply the acquisition of perceptual belief.[9] But this "belief-analysis" of perceptual experience is problematic. Gareth Evans (1982) emphasized that how things are experienced as being is not necessarily how things are believed to be. If one is familiar with the Muller-Lyer illusion, for example, then one will not believe that the lines are of different lengths, even if it appears to one that the line with the outward pointing arrowheads is longer. If that is correct, it cannot be a general truth that experiencing things is simply the acquisition of a belief about how they are. Evans coined the phrase "nonconceptual content" to characterize his view of the content of experiences, a view which accomodates the "belief-independence" of experience. Though Evans's original discussion has generated an enormous amount of discussion, it is significant that he offers no explicit statement of what he takes nonconceptual content to be.

That is potentially problematic. For there are a variety of different things that it could be for the content of perceptual experience to be "conceptual" content or "nonconceptual" content.

2. *Compositional and possessional questions about perceptual content*

Two different questions one might raise about perceptual content determine two ways of understanding the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content. Suppose a set of circumstances in which a subject is undergoing a perceptual experience with a content, *p*. One question one might ask of such a set of circumstances is,

(1) Is *p* composed of concepts?

where *p* is composed of concepts if and only if *p* is built up exclusively from Fregean senses. What it is for *p* to be built up exclusively from Fregean senses is, let us suppose, for each of the constituents of *p* to be a δ such that there exists a completing content G with regard to which a thinker may believe that (G(δ)) while rationally disbelieving or doubting that (G(ε)), even though "δ" and "ε" have the same extensions. That there is a constituent of *p* for which no such completing content exists will, in this sense, be sufficient for *p* to lack exclusively conceptual structure. Framed against the background of such a question about the structure of truth-evaluable content, one might then conceive what it is for the content of perceptual experience to be conceptual or nonconceptual in the following ways:

(CC_{comp}) Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a conceptual content iff *p* is composed of concepts.

(NC_{comp}) Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a nonconceptual content iff it is not the case that *p* is composed of concepts.

The distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content, understood in this way, is a distinction between different views about the composition of the truth-evaluable contents of perceptual experience. Correspondingly, when the notions of conceptual and nonconceptual content are understood as fixed by these questions, I shall talk of conceptual and nonconceptual content in the "compositional" sense.

If the content of experience is a Fregean Thought, then its content is conceptual in the compositional sense. The paradigmatic nonconceptual content, in this sense, is a Russellian proposition, a structure consisting of objects, properties, and relations, not of senses. But various kinds of non-Russellian contents can also satisfy this criterion on being nonconceptual. Contents conceived of as sets of possible worlds, along the lines suggested by Stalnaker (1976) and (1984) are compositionally nonconceptual. Many of the different types of perceptual content that have figured in Christopher Peacocke's recent work on perceptual experience—the "protopropositional" and "scenario" contents of Peacocke (1992), and the "analogue ways of experiencing" of Peacocke (1986) and (2000)—are all nonconceptual in the compositional sense.

One sometimes finds the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual content understood along these lines, as a distinction between views about the composition of the truth-evaluable contents of perceptual experience. Robert Stalnaker (1999), for example, manifests this way of understanding the nature of the debate when he writes:

> (T)here are many kind of abstract objects that have, or determine, truth conditions… Some of them may be appropriately called "conceptual" in some sense; others may appropriately be called "nonconceptual". For example, one might define complex

> objects, nested ordered sequences that reflect the recursive semantic structure of the sentences with which the structure is associated. The ultimate constituents of such structures might consist wholly of senses or concepts. Maybe *conceptual* content is an object of this kind.... Alternatively, one might take the ultimate constituents of such structures to be individual objects and properties and relations (the referents of names and the properties and relations expressed by predicates in the relevant sentences). Perhaps this is a kind of *nonconceptual* content.[10]

It is a compositional conception of conceptual and nonconceptual content that underpins the dispute between John McDowell and Christopher Peacocke. According to Peacocke (2000) a conceptual content is "content of a kind that can be the content of judgement and belief".[11] Similarly, John McDowell (1994) maintains that conceptual content is "judgeable"[12] or "thinkable"[13] or "articulable"[14] content. For these theorists, with their respective Fregean attitudes to the content of judgement and thought, "judgeable" or "thinkable" contents are in turn characterized as "conceptually organized items"[15]; or contents that are "built up from concepts"[16], or that have concepts as "components"[17] or "contain"[18] concepts. Correspondingly, for these writers, nonconceptual contents are those that do not have concepts as constituents: we might suppose they are—in this particular sense, at least—nonjudgeable, unthinkable, or inarticulable contents.

A question about perceptual content that, at least on the face of it, appears rather different, concerns the relation between a subject's undergoing the kind of episode that he does when he has an experience with the content *p*, and his possession of certain conceptual skills. Suppose that where a subject is undergoing an experience with the content *p*, there is a set of concepts that "characterizes" or "specifies" that content: a set of concepts "which reveals the way in which it (that content) presents the world".[19] The concepts that characterize the content of the belief that grass is green, for example, are the concept *grass*

and the concept *green*. And the concepts that characterize the content of an experience in which it seems to one as if the vase is red are the concept *vase* and the concept *red*. Against this background, one might ask:

(2) In order for *S* to be undergoing an experience with the content *p*, is it necessary for S to possess the concepts that characterize *p*?

The nonconceptualism of Crane (1992), (2001) and Bermudez (1998) is a position delivered by a negative answer to this question. What this second question brings into focus is not the nature of the constituents of the truth-evaluable content. Rather, what's at issue here is what it is for a subject to be related towards that truth-evaluable content in perceptual experience, and whether a condition of that relation is a grasp of certain ways of thinking. I call this a "possessional" question about perceptual content. The possessional question determines corresponding possessional ways of understanding the notions of conceptual and nonconceptual content. Theorists like Crane and Bermudez understand the distinction between nonconceptual and conceptual content along the following lines[20]:

(CC_{poss}) Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a conceptual content iff in order for *S* to be undergoing *e*, *S* must possess the concepts that characterize *p*.

(NC_{poss}) Where *S* has an experience, *e*, with the content *p*, *p* is a nonconceptual content iff it is not the case that in order for *S* to be undergoing *e*, *S* must possess the concepts that characterize *p*.

Given the amount of discussion that the notion of nonconceptual content has generated it is interesting that these differences in the way that the subject-matter of debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists is conceived have received little attention.[21] For whether the truth-evaluable contents of perceptual experience are composed of concepts or not is—at least on the face of it—a different issue from that concerning whether a subject's undergoing an experience with a certain content entails that they possess the concepts that characterize it. That there are different issues here is borne out by the fact that the theorist's answer to question (1) does not determine his answer to question (2), and vice versa. Let me explain.

3. *The space of positions*

Compositional and possessional claims about the content of perceptual experience may run in step with one another. This may occur in either of two ways. On a "pure" conceptualist position, the content of a perceptual experience that a subject is undergoing is conceived as conceptual in both the compositional and the possessional sense. Consider a simple "belief-analysis" of perceptual experience. On this view, a subject's having an experience with the content *p* is to be analyzed as a case of the subject's perceptually believing that *p*. Against the background of a Fregean attitude to the content of beliefs, the identification of the content of experience with the content of a belief determines the content of experience as compositionally conceptual. Conceptualism about possession holds on this view also, given that having an experience with the content *p* is just perceptual belief that *p* and given that we can grant that a subject could not believe that *p* without possessing the concepts that

characterize p. If the belief-analysis is correct, then, the content of experience is conceptual in both senses. Call pure conceptualism position P1.

On a "pure" nonconceptualist position the content of experience is both compositionally and possessionally nonconceptual. Consider a primitive species of a "causal" or "informational" account according to which the contents of perceptual experiences are taken to be Russellian propositions and on which a subject's undergoing a perceptual experience with the content a is F is taken to consist in the fact that the relevant perceptual event is caused by some particular object, a, and instance of the property F. Russellian propositions are composed of items at the level of reference, not of sense. And that the relevant perceptual event is caused by some particular object and property instance does not, one can reasonably suppose, require the subject's possession of the concepts that characterize that content (at least, in the sense of concept possession that is at issue here). In a causal or informational position of this kind, perceptual content is compositionally and possessionally nonconceptual. Call a pure nonconceptualism P2.

But there are ways of thinking about perceptual content according to which it exhibits both nonconceptual and conceptual features.

It is both coherent to suppose, and there exist positive sources of motivation for holding, that the content of experience is conceptual in the possessional sense though nonconceptual in the compositional sense. On this third position, P3, question (1) is answered negatively, and question (2) positively.

Consider a position with affinities to suggestions of Evans (1982). Take here as basic a case in which an informational event, carrying the content, *a is F*, occurs within a subject's visual system. Suppose that the content of the informational event is Russellian; it involves objects and properties as opposed to concepts of those items. And suppose, further, that the

event within the visual system is capable of carrying the Russellian content *a is F* whether or not the subject whose system it is possesses the concepts that characterize that content. The event carries the content, say, as Evans (1982) does, in virtue of connections between those events in the visual system and occurrences in the motor system; relations that can be in place without the possession of concepts. But the fact that an event within the subject's visual system carries such a content is not yet, on the P3 position, for the subject to undergo a perceptual experience with such a content. For events within the visual system deliver much informational content that is not reflected in the content of a perceptual experience concurrent with them. For perceptual experience, that content must be "accessible to the subject" or "serve as input to a *thinking*, *concept-applying* and *reasoning* system".[22] On P3, the range of capacities that the system (the subject) possesses, in turn, determines which contents are capable of being the contents of experiences the subject is undergoing.[23] For the content, *a is F*, of a mere information-carrying event to be capable of the cognitive integration necessary for perceptual experience with the content *a is F*, the subject must be capable of taking up that content in the thinking of thoughts or the having of beliefs to the effect *that a is F*. Though perceptual experience with the content *a is F* is not here identified with the belief *that a is F*, it is the standing capacity for such belief that enables the subject to be credited with experiences with such a content.

Given that the ability to think those thoughts and make those judgements requires the subject to possess the concepts (x)a and (x)F, and that these are the concepts that characterize the content of the experience, the content of experience thus conceived is conceptual in the possessional sense. Nevertheless, the content of the perceptual experience is compositionally nonconceptual. For the role of concept possession within such an account is simply to make available to the thinking, reasoning and concept-applying subject the Russellian contents of

events within the visual system. On a position such as this, "conceptual capacities… do not enter into *determining the content* with which one takes oneself to be presented, but serve only to account for one's *access* to that content, which is independently determined by the informational system." [24]

Motivation for such a position resides in the way it simultaneously accommodates "conceptualist" and "nonconceptualist" intuitions; intuitions that may be independently robust. On this view there is a distinction between the representational capacities of creatures which lack concepts and those which possess them. Though the perceptual systems of nonconceptual animals and infants capable of receiving information about the world, they are not thereby capable of undergoing content-bearing perceptual experiences. In the case of infants and animals, the contents of such informational states and events do not serve as input to a rational, self-conscious, and reflective thinker. In such creatures, those contents are not capable of being taken up in thoughts or beliefs which connect such representations to a conceptually-organized worldview. The position discharges the conceptualist thought that broadly Kantian considerations explain why creatures that do not possess the relevant concepts are incapable of undergoing genuine content-bearing perceptual experiences.

At the same time, the P3 theorist accounts for the nonconceptualist intuition that there is a visual, spatial and chromatic component of the content of experience that is poorly accommodated by taking experiences and beliefs (or judgements) to be merely distinct attitudes to the same conceptually-composed truth-evaluable contents. On this version of P3, the contents of perceptual experiences are Russellian propositions. They do not consist of cognitive modes of presentation, but spatial relations, shape properties and colour properties. The visual and spatial, *sensory*, properties that constitute the content of experience, on this view, are different in kind from the cognitive constituents of the contents of belief, and

attempts to identify unsatisfyingly run together claims about the contents of experiential inputs to judgement and belief with the conceptually composed contents of judgement and belief themselves. A position like P3 preserves a place for the nonconceptualist intuition that against the background of Fregeanism about belief some fundamental distinction must hold between the truth-evaluable contents of belief and experience on pain of committing a category mistake along the lines of illegitimately inferring features of what is linguistically described from features of the linguistic description.

A different way of conceiving of the content of experience as possessing both conceptual and nonconceptual features would be a view according to which perceptual content is conceptual in the compositional sense but nonconceptual in the possessional sense. On this kind of hybrid position question (1) is answered affirmatively, and question (2) negatively. Where a subject is undergoing an experience with the content p, the content of the experience is conceptually composed, though it is not necessary for the subject to be undergoing an experience with such a content that they possess the concepts that characterize it. Call a position of this kind a P4 position.[25]

Suppose that the content of a mature human being's perceptual experience is conceptual in the compositional sense, that it is exclusively composed of Fregean modes of presentation. Let us suppose, further, that if one is not misled in such circumstances, the conceptually composed content of one's perceptual experience is also a perceptible fact: it is "how things are"; an "aspect of the layout of the world"; or "an aspect of the perceptible world"[26]. In a case in which appearances do not mislead one, then, the content of one's experience is simply the fact *that p*, where the fact *that p* is at the same time a conceptually composed, judgeable or thinkable content. Now suppose one takes the non-misleading circumstances to be central in the sense that genuinely experiencing *that p* entails that the subject is related, in

perception, to the fact *that p*. Illusions and hallucinations are cases in which it is for the subject just as if they are undergoing an experience with relevant factual content, though they are not.[27]

So experience is a mode of perceptual sensitivity to the conceptually composed facts: to the judgeable or thinkable aspects of the layout of the world. But the P4 theorist maintains that there are different modes of perceptual access to the same conceptually composed perceptible facts. In the case of mature human beings such perceptual sensitivity is mediated by what McDowell (1994) has called our "second nature": the conceptual capacities one acquires when one has been trained to speak a public language. Our mode of perceptual sensitivity to the world involves the "actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness"[28]. But infants and animals, as well as mature human beings, are capable of sensitivity to aspects and features of their environment. Their mode of access to the perceptible facts is distinct from the mode of access we mature humans enjoy. For nonlinguistic animals or prelinguistic infants lack the conceptual capacities constitutive of second nature.

While they do not possess concepts in the sense at issue here, infants and animals nevertheless possess information-processing capacities of certain kinds, capacities that enable them to respond differentially in a reliable way to aspects and features of their surroundings. In animals, perceptual sensitivity to the facts involves the drawing on, in combination, of capacities for reliable differential response to the relevant aspects of the world. In general, suppose, a creature is enabled to undergo a perceptual experience with the conceptually composed fact *that a is F* as its content when the event he undergoes results from the combined activation of capacities to respond differentially to something's being a and something's being F.

The requirement that in order to undergo an experience with the relevant fact as its content the creature must possess the capacity to reliably and differentially respond to the aspects of the world that make up the perceived fact, harmonizes well with our intuitions about which contents nonconceptual infants and animals are capable of perceptual openness to. We may wonder whether the frog which flicks its tongue out at a fly which moves into its field of vision is perceptually open to the fact *that there is a fly at such and such a position* or whether the content of his experience is *that there is a moving speck there*.[29] Evidence that he flicks his tongue out in that way at anything which moves would constitute some evidence, though not conclusive evidence by any stretch, for the latter. But these are both things that we feel could be facts of the matter about the frog, consistently with the contingent facts about the kind of creature it is and the kinds of things a creature of that kind could be perceptually sensitive to. On the other hand, it will is doubtful that a frog can be perceptually open to the fact *that there is an economy class ticket to New York at such and such a position*, or *that there is a Geiger counter there*. For it is implausible to suppose that a creature of his kind could possess a disposition to respond in a reliable and differential way to things of those kinds.

For a P4 theorist, then, the content of the perceptual experience of a nonlinguistic infant or animal is just the same compositionally conceptual content that we mature human beings can be perceptually sensitive to in our own conceptually-mediated way. *That there is a fly at such and such a position* is a conceptually composed content that we, as well as the frog, can be open to in experience when circumstances are right. On this view, that is just to say that the worldly fact *that there is a fly at such and such a position* is something that both ourselves, and the frog, can enjoy a mode of perceptual sensitivity to. What differs across

ourselves and the frog is not the factual content of our perceptual experience, but what is involved in our respective modes of access to it.

As in the case of the previous hybrid position, the philosophical motivations for holding P4 derive from the simultaneous capture of particular conceptualist and nonconceptualist intuitions. A P4 position accommodates the nonconceptualist thoughts that infants and animals are capable of undergoing experiences with truth-evaluable content even though they do not possess the conceptual capacities that characterize the content of their experience. So there need be no familiar nonconceptualist accusation of chauvinism here, to the effect that such a theory implausibly denies the capacity to undergo experiences with representational contents to infants and animals. But these nonconceptualist intuitions are accompanied by conceptualism about composition. The contents of animal and mature human experience are the same when they consist of the same perceptible fact, or the same "aspect of the layout of the world". In turn, those perceptible facts or aspects of the layout of the world are conceptually composed, judgeable or thinkable entities. Even though languageless animals are incapable of grasping the conceptual capacities that would enable them to think or judge how things are—the capacities of second nature that are drawn on when we undergo perceptual experiences—what they are open to in experience are precisely those conceptually composed things that can be the objects of judgement and thought.

The coherence of positions P3 and P4 suggests that the question about whether the truth-evaluable contents of perceptual experiences are composed of concepts or not is genuinely distinct from the question concerning whether a subject's having an experience with a certain content requires them to possess the concepts that characterize that content. That issues of composition and possession are distinct from one another, or at the very least appear to be

distinct from one another, has troublesome consequences for the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists.

4. *Nonconceptualism for and against*

In the literature, the terms "conceptual content" and "nonconceptual content" are used undifferentiatedly, with no relativization to either of the different senses I have tried to articulate. I aim to show what the price of this lack of relativization is. First, consider the standard arguments for the unrelativized claims that experience possesses "nonconceptual" content and "conceptual" content.

At the heart of many of the arguments for the "nonconceptualist" thesis is a defence of the claim that subjects can undergo perceptual experiences with truth-evaluable content without that requiring that they possess the concepts that characterize that content; the concepts that would equip them to conceptualize the ways things perceptually appear to them. This "Argument from Possession-Independence" is common in recent discussion of perceptual experience, being offered by Evans (1982), Bermudez (1998), Ayers (1991), Crane (1992) and Peacocke (2000), amongst others.

In the discussion that stimulated and set the intellectual scene for the current dispute between conceptualists and nonconceptualists, for example, Evans (1982) asks the question: "Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?"[30] (I take it that Evans's point is not that we cannot understand it but that it is false.) The content of perceptual experience of colour shades is nonconceptual because the range of concepts that the perceiver possesses does not restrict the representational contents of one's experiences of colour shades and—according to

writers influenced by Evans's discussion—neither is one's experience of shapes. A subject may not possess the concepts *carmine* or *dodecahedron*, for instance, but it is implausible to think that the failure to possess these concepts prevents that subject from undergoing experiences the content of which is specifiable by characterizations which involve the concepts *carmine* and *dodecahedron*. The content of a judgement or a belief that is made or acquired on the basis of such experiences will certainly require the possession of the concepts that characterize the content of the judgement or belief. But that restriction does not hold of the content-bearing perceptual experiences which are the *input* to such perceptual judgements. Further, so the argument goes, unless perceptual contents are nonconceptual, how are we to make sense of the experience of infants and animals, short of implausibly denying that their perceptual experience possesses any representational content at all?

In an influential and much-discussed series of lectures John McDowell (1994a) forcefully argues, against Evans and those influenced by him, that the content of experience is conceptual. Not only does McDowell argue that the nonconceptualist line of thought offered above is insufficient to establish the conclusion that the content of experience is nonconceptual. His overarching thesis is that experiences *must* have conceptual content and, hence, that nonconceptualism must be false.[31] I am happy to leave the task of giving a full and completely satisfying exposition of McDowell's argument to others. The core line of thought in McDowell's lectures is that experience must stand in an epistemic or normative relation to judgement, belief and thought. But the content of experience must be conceptual if it is to stand in that relation.[32] Therefore the content of experience is conceptual. I call this argument for conceptualism "The Epistemically-Driven Argument".[33]

It is natural to think that how things perceptually appear provides a source of justification for what one believes or judges. Very often, one may, it seems, have reason to believe what

one does because of how things perceptually appear to one. For McDowell, the fact that experience plays a justificatory role in relation to beliefs and thoughts is not contingent, though: experience must be a source of epistemic constraint on beliefs and judgements if those beliefs are to have genuine empirical contents, that is, if they are to represent the world at all. But beliefs and judgements do have genuine empirical content, so experiences must justify beliefs.

Nonconceptualism cannot account for the justificatory role of experience. Although nonconceptual contents are truth-evaluable and that the experiences alleged to have them are therefore capable of standing in relations of implication or probabilification to beliefs and judgements, that does not show that experiences can provide reasons for beliefs in the relevant sense. For it does not show that the nonconceptual content putatively possessed by experiences can constitute the subject's reason for believing or judging something, or can constitute the reason for a belief from the subject's own point of view.

According to McDowell, that experiences possess conceptual content follows from what is required if a perceptual experience is to provide the subject's reason for a belief. A content-bearing experience is capable of providing the subject's reason for a perceptual belief or judgement only if the subject is capable of giving a response to a request for the ground of such a perceptual judgement, a response which indicates the ground of the perceptual judgement in the perceptual appearance. That response might be "I judge that there's a coffee cup on the desk because it seems to me that there's a coffee cup on the desk", but it may even be a judgement as minimal as "It looks like *that*""[34]. But if an experience that a subject is undergoing can play a justificatory role only if how things perceptually appear is capable of being conceptually characterized by the subject in responses to requests for reasons then the content of that experience must be conceptual.

So, according to the Epistemically-Driven Argument, beliefs must be justified by perceptual experiences. If perceptual experiences are to play a justificatory role, then the reasons they provide must be accessible to the subject: they must be the subject's reasons. But for experience to provide the subject with a reason, the subject must be capable of characterizing how things perceptually appear when asked for the grounds of her empirical beliefs. But then if the content of perceptual experience that a subject is undergoing must be articulable in this way then it must be conceptual.

5. *Consequences of the distinction between composition and possession*

McDowell (1994a) takes the conclusion of the Epistemically-Driven Argument to be that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual in the sense that it is "judgeable", "thinkable" or "articulable" content; content which he also describes as "conceptually organized"[35] or content in which concepts "figure"[36]. In this compositional conception of conceptual (and nonconceptual) content McDowell is followed by Peacocke (1992) and (2001). The disagreement between Peacocke and McDowell over whether the Epistemically-Driven argument delivers or not is at the heart of the contemporary dispute about nonconceptualism, as is their conception of conceptual and nonconceptual content as content that is conceptually built up and content that is not conceptually built up. With the two chief protagonists in this debate, then, let us suppose that conceptual content is conceptually composed content, and nonconceptual content is content that is not conceptually composed.

Against the background of a compositional conception of conceptual and nonconceptual content, though, neither the Epistemically-Driven Argument for conceptualism nor the

nonconceptualist Argument from Possession-Independence deliver. The reasons why the different lines of thought don't work are related. Let me explain.

Consider the Epistemically-Driven Argument. Granting epistemic internalism and the argumentative conception of justification, what follows from the Epistemically-Driven argument is that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual in the possessional sense.[37] If a subject does not possess the concepts that characterize the content of the experience she is undergoing, then the experience in question could not play the justificatory role that it is required to play if empirical beliefs and judgements are to have any empirical content at all. For if she lacked the relevant concepts, she would not be capable of conceptually characterizing how things appear. And if she were not able to do that, then how things appear would not be the kind of thing that could be a reason for her to believe what she does, or something that is "accessible" to her. To put it in a more McDowellian idiom, were she to fail to possess the concept that characterized how things appear, then the content of the experience would fall outside the scope of spontaneity, or outside the subject's capacity for rational self-scrutiny. But unless it fell within the scope of spontaneity or within the subject's capacity for rational self-scrutiny, it would be incapable of serving as a reason and hence could not be the content of the subject's perceptual experience.

But from the mere fact that a subject could not undergo a perceptual experience with a certain content unless they possessed the concepts that characterized that content.it does not follow that the content of experience is conceptual in the compositional sense: that it is judgeable. The coherence of P3 above indicates why. For on this position the content of experience is conceptual in the possessional sense but not in the compositional sense. A P3 theorist does not resist McDowell's claims that in order for someone to be undergoing a perceptual experience with the content *p*, *p* must "come within the scope of the faculty of

spontaneity" or *p* must be potentially subject to the active and critical capacities of a rational subject. Quite the contrary. On a position such as this, it is only in virtue of the fact that the subject is capable of entertaining thoughts involving the concepts that characterize the content of a certain informational state that we can talk sensibly about the accessibility of that content and hence of a subject's undergoing an experience with such a content. But these requirements on concept possession hold though the contents of those experiences are not judgeable.

To illustrate, consider the following, from the Afterword of McDowell (1994):

> The routine point is really no more than that there can be rational relations bewteeen its being the case that P and its being the case that Q (in a limiting case what replaces "Q" can simply be what replaces "P"). It does not follow that something whose content is given by the fact that it has the correctness condition that P can eo ipso be someone's reason for, say, judging that Q, independently of whether the content is conceptual or not. We can bring into view the rational relations between these contents—its being the case that P and its being the case that Q—only by comprehending the putatively grounding contents in conceptual terms, even if our theory is that the items that has that content does not do its representing in a conceptual way. A (nonconceptualist) theory does not credit ordinary subjects with this comprehensive view of the two contents, and I think that leaves it unintelligible how an item with the nonconceptual content that P can be someone's reason for judging that Q".

Granting his internalism and argumentative conception, McDowell is right, in one sense, that whether an experience with the content *p* can be a reason for a belief *that q* is not "independent of whether the content is conceptual or not". (I here dispense with the question-begging "that *p*" locution to characterize nonconceptual contents) It cannot be independent of whether the content of perceptual experience is conceptual in the *possessional* sense. But McDowell's intended conclusion is that the content of experience is conceptual in the

compositional sense. That conclusion does not follow, though, for possessional and compositional conceptualist theses are distinct. On a P3 position, the content of an experience is nonconceptual in the compositional sense, even though a subject must have a "comprehensive view" of the content of experience, or must be able "to consider the putatively grounding content in conceptual terms", just in virtue of the fact that it is a conscious perceptual experience that the subject is undergoing.[38]

I emphasize that I am not here arguing that P3 is necessarily the right way to think about perceptual content. Rather, I claim that a consequence of the coherence of such a position, and the fact that there exist a range of plausible sources of motivation for such a view, is that if conceptual content is understood as content which is conceptual in the compositional sense, then the Epistemically-Driven argument for conceptualism appears to fail.

The place in conceptual space for P4, and the fact that there are plausible sources of motivation for that position too, creates a parallel difficulty for the nonconceptualist Argument from Possession-Independence.

At the core of the Argument from Possession-Independence is the claim that a subject is capable of undergoing a perceptual experience with the content *p* while lacking the concepts that characterize *p*. If this claim is correct, it establishes that the content of experience is nonconceptual in the possessional sense. For if a subject can be undergoing an experience with the content *p* while lacking the concepts that characterize *p* then it cannot be necessary for such a subject to be undergoing such an experience that they possess the relevant concepts. But the truth of this nonconceptualist claim about possession does not, at least, without further independent argument, establish the truth of the type of nonconceptualist claim that has become central in the debate: that the content of experience is not conceptually composed, or that it is not judgeable or thinkable. For on a P4 position, the content of

experience is conceptually composed, judgeable or thinkable content, though it is not necessary for a subject to be undergoing an experience with such a conceptually composed content that they possess the concepts that characterize it. It is coherent to hold, and there may be significant positive sources of motivation for the claim that the content of an experience that an animal or infant that lacks conceptual capacities may nevertheless be conceptually composed content. The content of a frog's perceptual experience may be *that there is a fly at such and such a position*. That content is something conceptually built up, or judgeable, though the fly does not possess the concepts that characterize that content.

In the following section, I briefly address some general worries about the legitimacy of the distinction between compositional and possessional questions about perceptual content. But a concern about the character and role of a position like P4 in the discussion already warrants attention.[39]

A sceptic about a position like P4 is likely to object that although there may be some sense in which the content of a subject's experience is judgeable even though that subject fails to possess the concepts that characterize that content, it is not the content of the experience in the sense relevant to the dispute. For if the subject does not possess the concepts that characterize the conceptually composed content, that content could not be *how things appear from the subject's own point of view*, or could not be the *personal level* content of the subject's perceptual experience. But surely, it may then be argued, it is the nature of how things appear from the subject's own point of view that nonconceptualists and conceptualists dispute. So to the extent that P4 marks a coherent conception of the content of experience, it does not describe circumstances in which how things appear from the subject's own point of view is both compositionally conceptual and possessionally nonconceptual. So

it fails to vitiate the Argument from Possession-Independence, at least where that argument is understood in the relevant way.

But what justifies the claim that such constraints on concept possession must be satisfied if the conceptually composed contents in question are to be how things appear from the subject's own point of view, or to be personal level contents?

The requirement perhaps stems from the following thought. If the content of a subject's experience is a conceptually composed (judgeable or thinkable) content, and the subject does not possess the concepts that characterize that content, then the only sense in which the subject is undergoing an experience with such a content is in an "as-if" sense. While it may be useful for explanatory purposes for us to talk in circumstances in which the subject lacks the relevant concepts as if such a subject is undergoing an experience with the judgeable content *p*, such talk is convenient fiction. For anything to be a genuine case of content-bearing perceptual experience, there must be something about the subject himself, independent of the decisions and explanatory goals of the third-personal theorist, that makes it determinate whether he undergoes an experience with the content *that p* or the content *that q*. But the only thing that could make it determinate that a subject is undergoing an experience with the content *that p* is that the subject possesses the conceptual capacities that characterize *p* and that those conceptual capacities are drawn on or actualized in the right way in the sensory event that occurs in him.

But this fails to tell against the P4 view characterized earlier. For on this view, there is something about the subject that makes it determinate, independently of the third-personal theorist and his explanatory interests, whether he undergoes a perceptual experience with the content *that p*, as opposed to the content *that q*, say. For the subject to be undergoing an experience with the content *that p* requires, not the possession of the conceptual capacities of

our second nature, but the possession of the reliable responsive dispositions that correspond with the constituents of the content, and requires that those capacities are drawn on in the right way in the sensory event he undergoes. Whether these facts obtain is independent of the content-attributions we make from our third-personal point of view, and of the different explanatory interests that inform our thoughts about his mental life. Our best guesses, even after sufficient investigation, of which content-bearing events a nonconceptual creature may undergo in a certain type of circumstance will be at best provisional and speculative, and further observations of behaviour may always indicate narrower or wider sensitivity to aspects and features of the world on the part of the creature than initially we may have thought. On P4, thought about how things are from the nonconceptual infant's or animal's point of view, unlike the truth of as-if content attributions, remains answerable to facts about the animal that hold independently of us.

So if there is a principled reason to think that P4 cannot show that the personal level content of experience may be conceptual in the compositional sense but not in the possessional sense, that reason must come from elsewhere. In the absence of further argument, the Argument from Possession-Independence, understood as an argument for the view that the contents of perceptual experience are not conceptually composed, appears to fail for similar reasons as did the Epistemically-Driven argument. It fails to acknowledge the independence of questions of composition from questions of possession, and the coherence and theoretical plausibility of positions with both conceptualist and nonconceptualist features.

6. *Is composition really orthogonal to possession?*

Some theorists of mental content say, or appear to say, that there is no distinction between the issue whether the content of perceptual experience is conceptually composed and the question whether the possession of the relevant concepts is necessary for a subject to be undergoing an experience with such a content. What it is for something to be the conceptually-structured content *that a is F* is just for it to be whatever content it is that one has such that one's having of it is dependent on one's possession of an ability to think about *a*s and an ability to think about *F*s, and such that those abilities are "combined in the right kind of way" in the having of it. "(T)o say that concepts are not components of contents" says Tim Crane (1992) "is to say that the subject does not have to possess the concepts used to characterize the content in order for his or her state to have such a content".[40]

If this attitude is right, then the criticism I have offered here is wide of the mark.[41] If there is no gap between the question about composition and the question about possession, then against my criticism of the Epistemically-Driven argument, conceptualism about possession establishes conceptualism about composition. And the identity of these questions also undermines the corresponding difficulties for the Argument from Possession-Independence.

But in the absence of any explicit argument, and I have been unable to find such argument in the literature, these claims remain only assertions. Assessing in detail the claim that there is in fact no such distinction is beyond the scope of this paper. But it is an interesting and suggestive question why the distinction between issues of composition and possession, and of the existence of possible positions like P3 and P4 which combine elements

of both “conceptualism” and “nonconceptualism”, might be thought to incoherent, even though at first sight they appear not to be.

There are, no doubt, a variety of currents of thought that lead in this direction. Broadly interpretationist ideas about what it is for states and episodes of mind to represent the world might explain opposition towards the coherence of P3. One might think, for example, that for a state of a subject or a mental episode in the life of a subject to possess a particular content is just for the attribution of that content—given the assumption that the subject is rational—to make their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour intelligible. Against the background of those views, one might deny that how an experience represents things as being could fail to be completely determined by the role that that experience is playing (the role that requires the possession of concepts and the disposition to apply them in various ways.) For the conceptually-mediated role that the experience is playing is the only feature recoverable from the publicly or third-personally observable evidence on the basis of which the process of content attribution is to be carried out. Once one has settled the facts about the concept-requiring role that a certain experience plays by scrutinizing observable patterns of conceptual behaviour, though, there is and can be no further question about how that experience represents things. For there is no further ascription of content the possession of which by that experience could be supported independently of the facts about the third-personally accessible role that it plays in the cognitive life of the subject.

I suspect that it is scepticism about whether there could be third-personally accessible conditions under which such content-bearing experiences could be attributed that underpins the intuition that P3 is incoherent. Now is not the place to launch a detailed critique of these ideas. I believe, however, that such views involve unattractive verificationist assumptions about the relation between what it is for one to be in a mental state or undergoing an episode

that possesses content and the possibility of attributing such states or episodes on the basis of third-personally accessible evidence that we would do well to steer clear of. At the very least it strikes me that these assumptions are in themselves far *more* problematic than the relatively sober claim that certain arguments about the nonconceptual content of perceptual experience have been compromised by a failure to distinguish between two different, but closely related, conceptions of the subject-matter of debate.

What about the pressure on P4? Earlier I reacted to the objection that a position such as P4 only characterized circumstances in which it is "as-if" a nonconceptual animal or infant is undergoing a perceptual experience with the conceptually composed content *that p*. Whether a creature is undergoing a perceptual experience with the conceptually composed content *that p* is not necessarily just a question of whether we choose to describe the infant or animal in that way, or whether it is otherwise useful or explanatory for us to do so. It is a matter of how things are with such a creature, and at least in part a matter of the possession and operation of the relevant information-processing abilities.

While it is possible to react in this way to the worry that content on P4 is just "as-if" content, there is a persistent intuition that such a position is incoherent or otherwise confused. But it is not obvious what the source of this intuition is and whether it tells against such a combination of conceptualist and nonconceptualist claims.

It cannot be objected that the P4 view is incoherent in that it both identifies the conceptually composed human way of representing, reflecting on, or linguistically characterizing the world with the way that an animal represents it, while at the same time distinguishing those ways of representing things in acknowledging that such conceptual and reflective practices are unavailable to such a creature. This worry just fails to engage with the distinction that is central to such a position. In as far as the "human way of representing" and

the “animal way of representing” refer to those capacities possession of which enables openness in experience to a conceptually composed content, the P4 theorist does not incoherently identify and distinguish them. The capacities that enable experience with a factual content are distinct across those who possess concepts and those who do not. What is common is the conceptually composed content: the perceptible fact to which subjects of both kinds can be open. There is no incoherence; at least—no obvious incoherence—here.

Perhaps the thought is that to take the infant or animal which lacks the relevant concepts to be, in a particular set of circumstances, undergoing an experience with a content expressible by the English language clause “that there is a fly at such and such a position in space” (the content *that there is a fly at such and such a position in space*) is just to question-beggingly identify something that is simply the conceptually composed content of *our* mature human perceptual experience with a way that the creature about which we are talking takes things to be. *That there is a fly at such and such a position* is not the content of the frog’s perceptual experience but is the conceptually composed content of ours. Though taking it that the creature is undergoing an experience with the content *that there is a fly at such and such a position* may be useful in that it allows us to predict their behaviour, there is no genuine or non-fictional sense in which the creature undergoes such an experience. The success of such fiction may indeed sustain the illusion that the creature is undergoing an experience with such a conceptually-composed content, but to do so is simply a conflation. It is just this disposition to mistake, or conflate, the judgeable contents of our mature human experience for the content of the frog’s that is responsible for the seeming coherence of P4.

But without further argument this worry itself begs the question, in either of two ways. What may drive this worry is that the judgeable, conceptually composed content of our mature human experience is itself a linguistic item: a public language sentence or sentence-

type. If the conceptually composed content of a judgement or expression is a linguistic item in this sense then it is surely incoherent to postulate genuine content-bearing states and events in the absence of concept possession or linguistic capacities, and the corresponding diagnosis of a conflation of our judgeable contents for the content of the frog's experience will look near to the mark. But that thesis about conceptually composed contents needs further argument, and is not established by the P4 theorist's claim that the conceptually composed content of an animal's experience is *that there is a fly at such and such a position*, nor his assumption that the *possession* of concepts requires linguistic abilities. The content expressed by the sentence "There is fly at such and such a position" cannot without further argument be identified with a sentence or sentence-type itself, and neither can the content *that there is a fly at such and such a position* be conceived as italicized. That itself involves a conflation, this time a conflation of the vehicles of content with the contents themselves.

If that is not what is driving such worries, it remans unclear what the ground is for the claim that the creature which lacks concepts could not be undergoing an experience with a conceptually composed content, or that the conceptually-composed contents of our mental states and events are "simply" or "only" the contents of *our* mental states and events. Whether the conceptually composed contents of our mental states are only *our* conceptually composed contents is precisely what such a theorist offers reasons to reject. On the P4 position the conceptually composed contents of perceptual experiences are perceptible facts or "aspects of the layout of the world". To hold that the conceptually composed content of our perceptual experience is the kind of thing that an animal with the relevant sensitivities can be related to when the circumstances are right is to hold no more than that there are aspects or features of the world to which creatures with different kinds of sensory capacities

can be related in different ways—that aspects and features of the world are intersubjectively accessible—yet which are also the kinds of things that can be thought or judged.

These defences do not establish that further reflection may not show that P4 is coherent or confused. But the considerations offered here do not appear to show that it is. There may be those who worry that the P4 theorist's view that facts are conceptually composed thinkables or judgeables, "slights the independence of reality" and is just a form of idealism.[42] Perhaps this line of investigation will unmask P4 as conceptually untenable. But if P4 is idealist, and if it is, whether it is idealist in a sense that we should resist, is not self-evident, and remains to be argued.

I maintain that as things stand there is no obvious reason why either P4 or P3 is inherently confused or unintelligible. Our initial worries about the Epistemically-Driven Argument and the Argument from Possession-Independence appear legitimate, and cause for concern.

7. *Conclusion*

I have tried to motivate the claim that there seems to be a problem at the heart of the most familiar debate in recent philosophy of perception. If one follows the two chief protagonists in this debate and understands what's at issue between conceptualists and nonconceptualist as whether the content of experience is "conceptually composed" or "judgeable" or not, then the main arguments for both of those positions appear to be invalid. Difficulties like these arise—I have suggested—from what looks like insensitivity to a distinction between two different issues about perceptual content, and what appears to be an unquestioned assumption that the

definitional attitudes to the subject-matter of debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists are synonymous.

I have argued that this synonymy, at the very least, cannot be unquestioningly assumed. There appear to be two distinct issues here, and that distinction is evidenced by the apparent coherence of positions P3 and P4, positions which consist in distinctive combinations of conceptualist and nonconceptualist claims. Further argument may show that there is indeed no distinction between issues of composition and possession. It may also turn out that while these issues are conceptually distinct there are further bridging principles available to the conceptualist and nonconceptualist that allow for the transition from the hybrid positions P3 and P4 to pure positions like P1 and P2. But I have tried to make the case that such claims require argument, and the literature as it stands does not contain them.

8. *Appendix: Heck on Nonconceptual states and contents*

Some recent work shows sensitivity to the fact that there might be a variety of ways of understanding conceptualism and nonconceptualism. But I am unconvinced that this work correctly articulates the nature of this variety. Richard G. Heck Jr. (2000) distinguishes between nonconceptualism about *states* and nonconceptualism about their *contents*. States—according to Heck—are nonconceptual when a subject's being in that state does not require the subject to possess the concepts we use to characterize the content of the state. And *content* is nonconceptual when it is not "conceptually articulated" or not "conceptually composed". Conversely, *states* are conceptual when a subject can only be in that state if he possesses the concepts that characterize its content, and *contents* are conceptual when they are conceptually articulated.

According to Heck, on the "state" conception, there is "nothing unusual" about perceptual content. Nonconceptualism here simply amounts to the claim that perceptual experience is a different type of state from a belief, a "nonconceptual" as opposed to a "conceptual" state. The view that Heck finds more substantial he calls the "content view". On this way of understanding experience, there is something different about the content of experience and the content of belief, thought and judgement. The contents of beliefs are "composed of concepts" while the contents of perceptual experience are not. It is the "content view" that Hecks takes himself to argue for in his paper, and he enlists Evans (1982) here as an ally: "Since Evans does speak, quite explicitly, of perceptual states as having nonconceptual content (see VR, 227), I think we cannot interpret him as having intended to defend the state view. His view was what we might call "the content view" that the content of perceptual states is different in kind from that of cognitive states like belief: The former is non-conceptual; the latter conceptual".[43]

I am not convinced by Heck's proposals, as they stand. First, Evans (1982) talks not only of nonconceptual contents but nonconceptual states, and he does so often in the same paragraph.[44] I do not think that this is because Evans held the "state view" instead of, or as well as, the "content view" of nonconceptualism. Rather, it is because Evans thought that talking about nonconceptual states and nonconceptual contents were just two ways of saying the same thing.

The obvious analogy here is with the use of the word "intentional". Intentionalists about perception apply "intentional" to both experiences and their contents. That is not because they are careless and slide between two conceptions of intentionalism. It is because to describe an experience as intentional is to thereby indicate that it possesses an intentional content.[45] And conversely when one describes an experience as having intentional content,

one indicates that the experience that has it is intentional. It is natural to take the application of "nonconceptual" to both states and contents as an extension of this of this idea. States are nonconceptual in virtue of having nonconceptual content. And one can communicate a claim about the experience's having a nonconceptual content either in terms of its content or in terms of the experience itself. What Heck seems to have offered is a distinction between two terminological variants that can be employed to express the fact that an experience possesses a nonconceptual content. But that is not to give two distinct "conceptions" of nonconceptual content.

This emerges more clearly, I think, in the course of his fuller elaboration of the "content" theses. From the outset of his paper Heck takes nonconceptual content to be synonymous with content that lacks "conceptual articulation" or lacks "conceptual composition". But when what it is for contents to have this property is addressed, it emerges that:

> The thesis that perceptual states do not have conceptual content then amounts to this: that perceptual content is *not conceptually articulated*, in the relevant sense; that being in a perceptual state with a given content *does not presuppose posssesion of particular cognitive capacities*; that being in a perceptual state with a given content *need not require one to grasp certain concepts (as determined by its content...* (2000, p.487–8, my emphasis.)

But that the subject need not possess certain concepts—those concepts determined by its content—in order to be in a state with that content is *also* just what determines that *state's* being nonconceptual (or "concept-independent"). Given the claims above, a nonconceptualist claim about the content of a state entails the nonconceptualist claim about the state itself. Further, if we are to take it that the perceptual states at issue on the state conception are content bearing states, and that the concepts relevant to their being nonconceptual or

conceptual are the concepts which characterize the content, as it seems reasonable to, then a state is nonconceptual only if its content is. Conversely:

> "(I)f the content of perceptual experience were conceptually articulated, a thinker's being in a perceptual state with a given content, composed of various concepts, would involve the joint exercise of cognitive capacities whose possession constitutes grasp of those concepts."[46]

For a perceptual state to have conceptual content, or to be "conceptually articulated" is for it to be the case that for the subject's perceptual experience to have that content, the subject must grasp certain concepts, concepts determined by the content itself. Given that, the claim that a perceptual experience has conceptual content entails that the experience is a conceptual ("concept-dependent") state. Again, assuming that the states at issue here are content bearing, and that the relevant concepts are those that characterize its content, then the fact that a state is conceptual also entails that its content is.

But if the truth of a "state" and a "content" claim both apparently turn on constraints of concept possession and whether they must be satisfied or not for the possession of perceptual content then some explanation then surely the "state conception" and the "content conception" of nonconceptualism (or conceptualism) are just two different ways of expressing the same thesis: in the case of nonconceptualism, that a subject can be in a state with a certain content without possessing the relevant concepts, and in the case of conceptualism that concept possession is required. However, if the distinction between "state" and "content" conceptions is *merely* the claim that nonconceptualist or conceptualist views may be couched in either the language of states or the language of contents, it remains unclear what the philosophical significance of such a distinction is, and what work it can do in helping us to understand this debate about perceptual experience.

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[2] See Bermudez (1998), Crane, (1992); Evans (1982); Martin (1992); Peacocke (1992, 1998, 2001).

[3] The *locus classicus* of conceptualist argument is McDowell (1994a). See also McDowell (1998), Sedivy (1996) and Brewer (1999). In what follows I shall be discussing visual perceptual experience. I shall take this qualification as understood.

[4] See, for example, Geach (1957), Dummett (1993), and McDowell (1994a).

[5] See Evans (1982), Peacocke (1992), (1998).

[6] This is a part of what Evans means when he talks that the having of thoughts involves the subject's conforming to the "Generality Constraint". See Evans (1982), pp.100–5.

[7] See, for example, Geach (1957), pp.16-7.

[8] See Harman (1990), Peacocke (1983, chs.1–3), Searle (1983, ch.2).

[9] See, for example, Armstrong (1968), ch.10. There is some oversimplification here. Armstrong is aware of the difficulties Evans goes on to diagnose, and accordingly suggests that perceptual experience involves a "disposition to belief". Further difficulties attend this reformulation. It is unclear whether the disposition to belief can itself be understood independently of supposing that someone has it in virtue of how things appear. But it was how things appear which was precisely what such a disposition was intended to explain. See Evans (1982), p.122-5.

[10] Stalnaker (1998), p.97.

[11] Peacocke (2001), p. 243.

[12] McDowell (1994a), p.26

[13] ibid. p.28–9.

[14] ibid. p.10.

[15] ibid, p.6.

[16] Peacocke (1992), p.63.

[17] ibid, p.68.

[18] ibid, p.77.

[19] Cussins (1990), p.283 fn.25.

[20] See Crane (1992), p.143 and Bermudez (1998), p.49.

[21] In the Appendix I discuss some recent work in which an attempt is made to distinguish different versions of conceptualism and nonconceptualism. It is easier to understand my worries about this discussion once my own proposals have been developed.

[22] Evans (1982), p.158.

[23] Such a position thus goes beyond the suggestions of Evans (1982), p.159) who insists that though the possession of some concepts is necessary for perceptual experience, the contents in question are not

(possessionally) conceptual. Evans (1982) implies that there are no particular concepts that a subject needs to possess in order to undergo an experience with a certain content. One of the strengths of P3 is its promise to deliver a more systematic development of a position with the structure Evans suggests.

[24] McDowell, (1994a p.64, emphasis mine).

[25] In the characterization of the mixed position I offer below I have benefited from the helpful comments and criticisms of an anonymous referee at this journal.

[26] McDowell (1994a), p.26-7.

[27] See McDowell (1982) and (1994a), lecture VI.

[28] McDowell, (1998), p.366.

[29] I take the example from McDowell (1994b).

[30] Evans, (1982), p.229.

[31] For additional arguments for the conceptualist thesis see Brewer (1999) and Sedivy (1996).

[32] In particular see McDowell (1994a), ch.3 and Afterword, Part II.

[33] An Epistemically-Driven Argument is also offered in Brewer (1998). I here concentrate on McDowell's formulation of the argument. The claims I advance in connection with McDowell are similarly applicable to Brewer's discussion.

[34] McDowell (1994a), p.166.

[35] McDowell (1994a), p.6.

[36] ibid. p.12.

[37] Though I assume these theses about justification for the sake of argument, I am unconvinced that McDowell (1994a) offers satisfactory arguments for them. I set these further questions about justification aside here.

[38] A curious feature of the passage is that McDowell's way of expressing his point seems to manifest an acknowledgement of the consistency of nonconceptualism about composition and conceptualism about possession. We must, he says, be capable of "comprehending the putatively grounding content in conceptual terms, even if our theory is that the items that has that content does not do its representing in a conceptual way". Even a theorist who holds that the content of experience is, for example, a property-involving content (or a scenario content of Peacocke (1992) or a perceptual "way of experiencing" of Peacocke (2001)) must take concept possession constraints to hold, McDowell maintains, if such a content is capable of providing a reason for a judgement. But what of the P3 theorist who takes the content of experience to be nonconceptual in the sense of nonjudgeable, but who takes such concept possession constraints to hold? If we read the remark through the lens of the distinction between composition and possession, it is hard to see it as anything other than an acknowledgement that considerations of concept possession will not, indeed cannot (by themselves, at any rate) establish the conclusion that the content of experience is compositionally conceptual.

[39] Remarks from an anonymous referee at *Erkenntnis* have helped greatly in suggesting lines of thought I aim to motivate and address in this section, and the next.

[40] Crane (1992), p.155.

[41] Some have insisted to me that all of those within this debate about perceptual content also assume that there is simply no gap between issues about the composition of perceptual contents and issues about perceptual experiences possessing those contents. So whether these writers talk about composition or possession they nevertheless take themselves to be talking about the same thing. Peacocke (1992, p.68, 77) suggests that this is at least not obviously true.

[42] The phrase is from McDowell (1994a) p.28.

[43] Heck (2000), p.485.

[44] See, for example, the much-quoted paragraph at (1982), p.227. He also does the same throughout ch. 5 section 2, and ch.6 section 3.

[45] For explicit examples of this relaxed talk see Searle (1983, p.40); Tye (1995, p.94).

[46] Heck (2000), p.488.